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My Word: Water edicts threaten Fla.

By George LeMieux

As Floridians work to get back on their feet, our efforts must be focused on improving our economy and creating jobs. Unfortunately, the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency is poised to impose unprecedented and costly water mandates next month that will harm Florida's economic rebound and provide little, if any, environmental benefit compared with the costs they will pose to Floridians.

Last year, the Obama administration and EPA entered into a legally binding agreement with environmental advocates seeking to impose stricter limits for phosphorus and nitrogen in Florida's waterways. Unfortunately, the standards and timelines have little scientific foundation. Worse yet, these mandates will increase the cost of doing business in our state and the cost of living for Floridians.

A joint study by the Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services and the University of Florida projects these mandates could cost Florida up to \$1.6 billion a year and eliminate 14,500 jobs. A survey of nine Florida water utilities estimated that a household's sewer rates would increase by \$62 per month, or more than \$700 per year.

That is a high price to pay for any regulation, let alone a mandate that is unlikely to produce significant environmental benefit. State and local agencies responsible for protecting Florida's waters have raised serious concerns about the methodology EPA used to develop these mandates, and the Florida Department of Environmental Protection has said, "compliance will force an investment of billions of dollars without environmental benefit." DEP scientists further argue that the "EPA-proposed criteria do not reflect a true relationship between nutrient enrichment and the biological health of Florida's surface waters."

It is also dubious as to whether the technology even exists for Florida's cash-strapped local governments and private industries to meet the standards proposed by EPA. Even if such technology exists, the cost to pay for it will be pushed onto Florida's families through higher water utility bills.

We all support clean water. Florida is a nationally recognized leader in promoting water quality. But at a time when our state is suffering from high unemployment, budget deficits and depressed

real-estate values, we must be cautious about forcing unwise, unaffordable and unproved federal water mandates on our communities, hardworking families and employers.

Floridians should be able to enjoy clean water without worrying about new mandates that will raise taxes, eliminate jobs and increase water bills. The EPA should drop this lawsuit-hastened effort that singles out Florida and instead look for realistic, science-based solutions that will truly improve the quality of our water.

George LeMieux is a U.S. senator for Florida.